

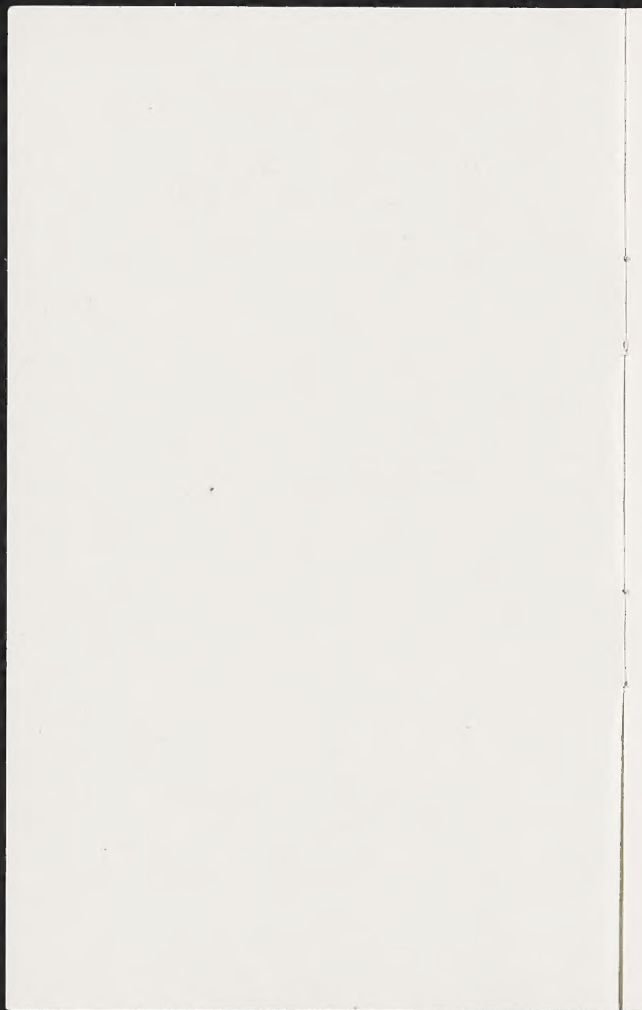
*The Bread Loaf  
School of  
English*

*Middlebury College*

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## THE BREAD LOAF SCHOOL OF ENGLISH

A few decades ago a citizen of Vermont built a summer place for himself and his many friends near Bread Loaf Mountain, one of the Green Mountains. With the passing summers the friends so multiplied that most of them became paying guests. Building after building was added; a recreation hall with a stage, large barns, and a row of cottages grew up, and the Bread Loaf Inn came to have an atmosphere distinguished by mountain life, leisure, and personality. The host, Joseph Battell, was of a creative turn of mind, and also eccentric, judging by the contents of the books which he wrote and had printed. He ruled the inn, where a good quality of plain living prevailed, and he made the agreeable porches, standing over a thousand feet above the distant Lake Champlain, the point of departure for high thinking and good fishing. He added forest land to his estate until its square miles comprise whole mountains, in fact, everything in sight excepting the blue speck of Adirondacks showing through a gap above Middlebury, in the west.

Joseph Battell lived his useful bachelor life well into the age of motor cars, which he detested and tried to outlaw in the state legislature, died, and left this estate and such of its traditions as might outlive him, to Middlebury College. In every part of Vermont this co-educational college of liberal arts has affected communities; in other states it is widely known for summer schools in

modern languages, schools that once were unique because their students were pledged to forswear their English throughout the six weeks of the session. The Inn did not prove to be a source of income as a summer hotel, and three years ago the college converted it into a summer school for the study of English, which started well, and gained, in numbers at least, each summer.

Last summer the one hundred students came from many states, but especially from New England and New York. More than a dozen courses were offered, including courses in Shakspeare, Browning, American Literature, and Vocal Training; but those in Modern Drama and Play Production attracted more than any other one subject, although a large group turned with especial interest to the contemporary novel or poetry, or to the so-called "creative writing."

The Battell regime was now reversed in that certain distinguished guests were asked to come and bring their tone of living literary activity with them; while the large group, students or professors, were host. Three celebrities of the previous summer, Robert Frost, Dorothy Canfield Fisher, and Grace Hazard Conkling (with her prodigy daughter, Hilda), had left almost visible marks on the school. This summer the poet and critic, Louis Untermeyer, and his wife, Jean Starr Untermeyer, spent an extended week-end with us in July, read from their own poems or from those of their friends, and spoke familiarly of persons and personalities of present-day poets. John Farrar,

editor of *The Bookman*; Edwin Markham, author of the "Man With the Hoe," and the novelist, Willa Cather, all were visitors. Miss Cather stayed for two weeks and made the deepest impression by her lectures and her contagious love of truth in writing and in living. Katharine Lee Bates was a regular teacher for five weeks, and showed that a noted scholar and poet might be a lively and kind neighbor.

Most of the hundred were teachers, some just out of college, some seasoned. There was plenty of chance to talk shop, but the shop was mostly a human kind of talk. I expected to meet many wild radicals quoting Mencken and the "Villagers" and "This Side Paradise," and denouncing Lusk laws. In the main I found them a liberal-minded group, and apparently very much interested in good education and in young people, and not at all inclined to think that things were going to the dogs. Some taught in city schools and had pupils whose English was not inherited, some in country high schools, where facilities were limited, some in well-equipped private schools or progressive suburban high schools. I talked with teachers whose enthusiasm and ability I envied, but with none whom I thought more fortunately placed than myself.

I will describe the advanced course in writing, which was considered by those who took it as the most exciting one of the school. We met nearly every morning in our professor's cottage. The living-room was large, and with easy chairs, other chairs, window-seat and

couch, accommodated all easily. It was often cold enough for a wood fire. The professor sometimes stood in front of the fireplace and read or lectured; often he sat in the back of the room while a member of the class spent an uneasy quarter hour in front. The uneasy persons were the ones condemned to read their productions and they were glad when the ordeal was over. Criticism became increasingly frank as the days passed, but it was constantly turned into constructive channels by the instructor. Two of the most memorable hours were those when Miss Cather gave the criticism; the professor was kind enough to do the reading of the stories or poems of the day. Our distinguished guest was swift and clear in pointing out the insincere or trite or untrue words or passages, and her praise carried the more weight when it came, in that it was not profuse or given for the sake of being encouraging. It was well given, and without condescension. Miss Cather's visits were highly valued.

The achievements of professional writers were sometimes compared with our own, sometimes on mimeographed sheets which did not tell which was which, excepting by internal evidence. One member of the class had published stories in magazines, and once when a poem of hers was unfavorably received she took revenge by selling it to a magazine. Little was said about publication, however—more about the art of writing truly and presenting people and action as they are, not as they may be dressed up in senti-

mental trimmings. All insincere "fine writing" received its merited censure, but poems or stories which had a "lift" to them, or achieved beauty, were praised and enjoyed.

The students of the school did not forget that it was summer, or that the green mountains were under and about them. Camping trips, camp suppers, tennis, overnight hikes to lodges on the long trail of Vermont, these and other recreations kept life varied enough. The dramatic group produced a play every week, the evening lectures, concerts, or special entertainments sometimes brought us in touch with the handful of old-time Bread Loafers who had known Mr. Battell, and one memorable Friday night was devoted to "The Follies of the Faculty," to the satisfaction, apparently, of all.

The food and other accommodations of the inn were thoroughly adequate and even excellent. The management was efficient, and, in matters sometimes difficult, friendly and human. Boys and girls from Middlebury College performed the tasks of domestic service, and gave those of us who are not Vermonters a very favorable impression of Middlebury College and of co-education there. No social lines were stressed; the waiters or waitresses played tennis or studied with those whom they served. It was a pleasant life and a wholesome company. To quote from one of the teachers who spent the summer there as a student: "Bread Loaf leaves a sweet taste in the mouth. I suppose it is due largely to the people we met, who were 'fine, perceiving and expressive.'"



The Summer Session of  
MIDDLEBURY COLLEGE

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The Summer Session of Middlebury College is wholly conducted in distinct schools of which the French, Spanish, Music and Chemistry Schools are conducted at Middlebury, the School of English at Bread Loaf Inn in the Green Mountains, and foreign sections of the French and Spanish Schools in Paris and Granada, respectively.

For information regarding these schools, address:

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